

thanked his uncle for everything and made his way through the village. He stopped at the pool office. Mr Abas was in his sunken cane chair, his eyes pursuing their separate lines of vision. Anderson wasn't sure if Mr Abas was asleep.

He said: 'I'm leaving now.'

'Leaving us to our hunger, are you?'

'There is hunger where I am going,' Anderson said.

Mr Abas smiled and said: 'Keep your heart pure. Have courage. Suffering cannot kill us. And travel well.'

'Thank you.'

Mr Abas nodded and soon began to snore. Anderson went on towards the junction.

As he walked through the heated gravity of the village Anderson felt like an old man. He felt that his face had stiffened. He had crossed the rubber plantation, had crossed the boundary, and was approaching the junction, when the rough forms with blazing eyes fell upon him. He fought them off. He lashed out with his stiffened hands and legs. They could easily have torn him to pieces, because their ferocity was greater than his. There was a moment in which he saw himself dead. But they suddenly stopped and stared at him. Then they pawed him, as though he had become allied with them in some way. When they melted back into the heat mists, Anderson experienced the new simplicity of his life, and continued with his journey.

§ *Interior journey* Tutuola; Carib: Harris (1)

AMA ATA AIDOO (1942 -)

I: The Message

'Look here my sister, it should not be said but they say they opened her up.'

'They opened her up?'

'Yes, opened her up.'

'And the baby removed?'

'Yes, the baby removed.'

'Yes, the baby removed.'

'I say ...'

'They do not say, my sister.'

'Have you heard it?'

'What?'

'This and this and that ...'

'A-ah! that is it ...'

'Meenuo!'

'They don't say meenuo ...'

'And how is she?'

'Am I not here with you? Do I know the highway which leads to Cape Coast?'

'Hmmm ...'

'And anyway how can she live? What is it like even giving birth with a stomach which is whole ... eh? ... I am asking you. And if you are always standing on the brink of death who go to war with a stomach that is whole, then how would she do whose stomach is open to the winds?'

'Oh, *poo*, pity ...'

'I say ...'

My little bundle, come. You and I are going to Cape Coast today.

I am taking one of her own cloths with me, just in case. These people on the coast do not know how to do a thing and I am not going to have anybody mishandling my child's body. I hope they give it to me. Horrible things I have heard done to people's bodies. Cutting them up and using them for instructions. Whereas even murderers still have decent burials.

I see Mensima coming. ... And there is Nkama too ... and Adwoa Meenu. ... Now they are coming to ... '*poo* pity' me. Witches, witches, witches ... they have picked mine up while theirs prosper around them, children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren - theirs shoot up like mushrooms.

'Esi, we have heard of your misfortune ...'

'That our little lady's womb has been opened up ...'

'And her baby removed ...'

Thank you very much.

'Has she lived through it?'

I do not know.

'Esi, bring her here, back home whatever happens.'

Yoo, thank you. If the government's people allow it, I shall bring her home.

'And have you got ready your things?'

Yes. ... No.

I cannot even think well.

It feels so noisy in my head. ... Oh my little child. ... I am wasting time.

... And so I am going ...

Yes, to Cape Coast.

No, I do not know anyone there now but do you think no one would show me the way to this big hospital ... if I asked around?

Hmmm ... it's me has ended up like this. I was thinking that everything was alright now. ... Yoo. And thank you too. Shut the door for me when you are leaving. You may stay too long outside if you wait for me, so go home and be about your business. I will let you know when I bring her in.

'Maami Amfoa, where are you going?'

My daughter, I am going to Cape Coast.

'And what is our old mother going to do with such swift steps? Is it serious?'

My daughter, it is very serious.

'Mother, may God go with you.'

Yoo, my daughter.

'Eno, and what calls at this hour of the day?'

They want me in Cape Coast.

'Does my friend want to go and see how much the city has changed since we went there to meet the new Wesleyan Chairman, twenty years ago?'

My sister, do you think I have knees to go parading on the streets of Cape Coast?

'Is it heavy?'

Yes, very heavy indeed. They have opened up my grandchild at the hospital, *hi, hi, hi...*

'Eno *due, due, due*... I did not know. May God go with you...'

Thank you. *Yaa.*

'O, the world!'

It's her grandchild. The only daughter of her only son. Do you remember Kojo Amisa who went to *sodja* and fell in the great war, overseas?'

'Yes, it's his daughter...'

... O, *poo*, pity.

'Kobina, run to the street, tell Draba Anan to wait for Nana Amfoa.'

'... Draba Anan, Draba, my mother says I must come and tell you to wait for Nana Amfoa.'

'And where is she?'

'There she comes.'

'Just look at how she hops like a bird... does she think we are going to be here all day? And anyway we are full already...'

O, you drivers!

'What have drivers done?'

'And do you think it shows respect when you speak in this way? It is only that things have not gone right; but she could, at least have been your mother...'

'But what have I said? I have not insulted her. I just think that only Youth must be permitted to see Cape Coast, the town of the Dear and Expensive...'

'And do you think she is going on a peaceful journey? The only daughter of her only son has been opened up and her baby removed from her womb.'

O ... God.

O

O

O

Poo, pity.

'Me... *poo* - pity, I am right about our modern wives. I always say they are useless as compared with our mothers.'

'You drivers!'

'Now what have your modern wives done?'

'Am I not right what I always say about them?'

'You go and watch them in the big towns. All so thin and dry as sticks - you can literally blow them away with your breath. No decent flesh any-

where. Wooden chairs groan when they meet with their hard exteriors.'

'O you drivers...'

'But of course all drivers...'

'What have I done? Don't all my male passengers agree with me? These modern girls... Now here is one who cannot even have a baby in a decent way. But must have the baby removed from her stomach. *Tchitaa!*'

'What...'

'Here is the old woman.'

'Whose grandchild...?'

'Yes.'

'Nana, I hear you are coming to Cape Coast with us.'

Yes my master.

'We nearly left you behind but we heard it was you and that it is a heavy journey you are making.'

Yes my master... thank you my master.

'Push up please... push up. Won't you push up? Why do you all sit looking at me with such eyes as if I was a block of wood?'

'It is not that there is nowhere to push up to. Five fat women should go on that seat, but look at you!'

'And our own grandmother here is none too plump herself... Nana, if they won't push, come to the front seat with me.'

'... *Hei*, scholar, go to the back...'

'... And do not scowl on me. I know your sort too well. Something tells me you do not have any job at all. As for that suit you are wearing and looking so grand in, you hired or borrowed it...'

'O you drivers!'

O you drivers...

The scholar who read this tengram thing, said it was made about three days ago. My lady's husband sent it... Three days... God - that is too long ago. Have they buried her... where? Or did they cut her up... I should not think about it... or something will happen to me. Eleven or twelve... Efua Panyin, Okuma, Kwame Gyasi and who else? But they should not have left me here. Sometimes... ah, I hate this nausea. But it is this smell of petrol. Now I have remembered I never could travel in a lorry. I always was so sick. But now I hope at least that will not happen. These young people will think it is because I am old and they will laugh. At least if I knew the child of my child was alive, it would have been good. And the little things she sent me... Sometimes some people like Mensima and Nkansa make me feel as if I had been a barren woman instead of only one with whom infant-mortality pledged friendship...'

I will give her that set of earrings, bracelet and chain which Odumfio Ata made for me. It is the most beautiful and the most expensive thing I have... It does not hurt me to think that I am going to die very soon and have them and their children gloating over my things. After all what did

they swallow my children for? It does not hurt me at all. If I had been someone else, I would have given them all away before I died. But it does not matter. They can share their own curse. Now, that is the end of me and my roots. . . . Eternal death has worked like a warrior rat, with diabolical sense of duty, to gnaw my bottom. Everything is finished now. The vacant lot is swept and the scraps of old sugar-cane pulp, dry sticks and bunches of hair burnt . . . how it reeks, the smoke!

'O, Nana do not weep . . .'

'Is the old woman weeping?'

'If the only child of your only child died, won't you weep?'

'Why do you ask me? Did I know her grandchild is dead?'

'Where have you been, not in this lorry? Where were your ears when we were discussing it?'

'I do not go putting my mouth in other people's affairs . . .'

'So what?'

'So go and die.'

'*Hei, hei*, it is prohibited to quarrel in my lorry.'

'Draba, here is me, sitting quiet and this lady of muscles and bones being cheeky to me.'

'Look, I can beat you.'

'Beat me . . . beat me . . . let's see.'

'*Hei*, you are not civilised, eh?'

'Keep quiet and let us think, both of you, or I will put you down.'

'Nana, do not weep. There is God above.'

'Thank you my master.'

'But we are in Cape Coast already.'

'*Meewu!* My God, hold me tight or something will happen to me.'

'My master, I will come down here.'

'O Nana, I thought you said you were going to the hospital We are not there yet.'

I am saying maybe I will get down here and ask my way around.

'Nana, you do not know these people, eh? They are very impudent here. They have no use for old age. So they do not respect it. Sit down, I will take you there.'

Are you going there, my master?

'No, but I will take you there.'

'No, but I will take you there.'

Ah, my master, your old mother thanks you. Do not shed a tear when you hear of my death . . . my master, your old mother thanks you.

I hear there is somewhere where they keep corpses until their owners claim them . . . if she has been buried, then I must find her husband . . . Esi Amfoa, what did I come to do under this sky? I have buried all my children and now I am going to bury my only grandchild!

'Nana we are there.'

Is this the hospital?

'Yes, Nana. What is your child's name?'

Esi Amfoa. Her father named her after me.

'Do you know her European name?'

No, my master.

'What shall we do?'

' . . . Esi lady, Lady Nurse, we are looking for somebody.'

'You are looking for somebody and can you read? If you cannot, you must ask someone what the rules in the hospital are. You can only come and visit people at three o'clock.'

Lady, please. She was my only grandchild . . .

'Who? And anyway, it is none of our business.'

'Nana, you must be patient . . . and not cry . . .'

'Old woman, why are you crying, it is not allowed here. No one must make any noise . . .'

My lady, I am sorry but she was all I had.

'Who? Oh, are you the old woman who is looking for somebody?'

Yes.

'Who is he?'

She was my granddaughter – the only child of my only son.

I mean, what was her name?'

Esi Amfoa.

'Esi Amfoa . . . Esi Amfoa. I am sorry, we do not have anyone whom they call like that here.'

Is that it?

'Nana, I told you they may know only her European name here.'

My master, what shall we do then?

'What is she ill with?'

She came here to have a child . . .

' . . . And they say, they opened her stomach and removed the baby.'

'Oh . . . oh, I see.'

My Lord, hold me tight so that nothing will happen to me now.

'I see. It is the Caesarean case.'

'Nurse, you know her?'

And when I take her back, Anona Ebusufo will say that I did not wait for them to come with me . . .

Yes. Are you her brother?'

'No. I am only the driver who brought the old woman.'

'Did she bring all her clan?'

'No. She came alone.'

'Strange thing for a villager to do.'

I hope they have not cut her up already.

'Did she bring a whole bag full of cassava and plantain and kenkey?'

'No. She has only her little bundle.'

'Follow me. But you must not make any noise. This is not the hour for coming here . . .'

My master, does she know her?'

Yes.'

I hear it is very cold where they put them . . .

It was feeding time for new babies. When old Esi Amfoa saw young Esi Amfoa, the latter was all neat and nice. White sheets and all. She did not see the beautiful stitches under the sheets. 'This woman is a tough bundle,' Dr. Gyamfi had declared after the identical twins had been removed, 'last stitches had been threaded off and Mary Koomson, alias Esi Amfoa, had come to.'

The old woman somersaulted into the room and lay groaning, not screaming, by the bed. For was not her last pot broken? So they lay them in state even in hospitals and not always cut them up for instruction?

The Nursing Sister was furious. Young Esi Amfoa spoke. And this time old Esi Amfoa wept loud and hard – wept all her tears.

Scrappy nurse-under-training, Jessy Treeson, second-generation-Cape-Coaster-her-grandmother-still-remembered-at-Egyaa No. 7 said, 'As for these villagers,' and giggled.

Draba Anan looked hard at Jessy Treeson, looked hard at her, all of her: her starched uniform, apron and cap . . . and then dismissed them all . . . 'Such a cassava stick . . . but maybe I will break my toe if I kicked at her buttocks,' he thought.

And by the bed the old woman was trying hard to rise and look at the only pot which had refused to get broken.

§ *Tradition and change* Achebe (1, 3), Emecheta, Soyinka, Okot

2: Motherhood and the Numbers Game

'Now
that I am suffering so much,
I know I am truly a mother,'

said
5 Egeif to the other screaming
woman.

2 painfully hoarse voices
still managing to bellow like
cows in an abattoir,
10 4 veins swollen to
sizes larger than the
2 necks they stood on.

'meda w'ase
meda w'ase
15 meda w'ase . . .

osiande,
ama meehu de,
saana moso
maawo!

20 I always marvelled at the
non-logic
of it all,

and even managed
the educated lady's dainty grin
25 the day
they told me that in all the
20 years I was away,
my mother never slept a wink!

30 The woman who spoke
– my mother's friend –
stared straight into my eyes
bespectacled already
as, it seems,
35 all eyes must be
20/20 visioned or not, when
folks turn 40 at the very least.

So
at 2 in the morning
I lie here in the dark
40 more sharp-eyed than
the cat my totem:

anxious
angry
sleepless –

45 blissfully anxious
happily angry and
nervously fulfilled

that

I
50 too
am
a mother!

13–19 Meda w'ase . . . maawo: the Fante words of which the first three lines of the poem are a translation, prefaced by three 'thank yous' [adapted from author's note].